# The Progressive Review

*Nbr 333*
*March 1995*


# The crash of America: how the country's elite wrecked its own empire, ruined the economy, fouled the environment and left Newt Gingrich in charge.

The premise here is simple: when the plane crashes, find out why.

Simple it may be, but few in federal Washington even seem to notice that the country they came to rule has crumbled around them and fewer still would accept the notion that it might be useful to inquire as to the cause of this disaster. The disaster, of course, is that of the country -- not that of its elite, which still floats like a hovercraft above the roiled waters of America.

To be sure, the more traditional faction of this elite has suffered a significant political blow in recent months, but now there is a new elite, headed by a man who hails from the richest county in Georgia, represents some of the wealthiest interests in the country, and still manages to call other people "elitist." This particular form of demagoguery is far from novel. Nixon and Wallace used it freely but then socio-economically they had better credentials for doing so. By 1978, says William Safire, elitism had already "become a standard blast at anyone with an undue regard for excellence as a criterion for the receipt of money or power."

The old elite, in its purest form, went to Ivy schools, practiced law or investments, and belonged to the Council on Foreign Relations. The new elite has been raised in the groves of advertising, marketing and focus groups, and is representative not of its legislative districts but of the largest trade associations. Its members speak not American but postmodern Orwellian. Listening to their rhetoric is like being trapped at table 129 -- with a bursting bladder and all the doors locked -- during a never-endng congressional dinner of the Asbestos Manufacturers Association. The members of this new elite may be different, yet by income, attitude and isolation, they are every bit as elitist as those they have expelled.

Thus the recent transfer of power was not from elitism to populism, but rather from one elite to another. And it did not happen, contrary to what one might glean from the elite media, as a result of some stunning sagacity on the part of the new crowd, but mostly due to the compounding ignorance, insularity and ineffectiveness of the old.

This old elite particularly prided itself in its wisdom and intelligence, but its greatest true skill was the successful circumnavigation of collective guilt. No embarrassment was too great, no crisis too unnecessary, no expense too inexplicable, and no war too unjustified, that it became ashamed. Instead, its members would rise as one to pronounce it not the time for blame, but rather for moving forward together into the future. Everyone would nod their heads and the foxes would renovate the chicken house once more.

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**The Progressive Review**
*Bucking the system since 1966*

The Progressive Review is published 10 times a year. Formerly the DC Gazette. One year subscription: $17. Two year subscription: $31. Single copies: $2.00. The Review uses Pacific News Service and monitors Peacenet.

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ISSN 0889-2202

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Psychologically impervious to either misfortune or fact, this elite never felt any need for rigorous self-examination. When things got truly out of hand, as when a president was assassinated, a blue ribbon investigation would be called, producing a ritual of introspection that, almost without exception, came to conclusions that were faulty, incomplete or deliberately deceptive.

When members of the elite faltered -- a Kissinger, Helms, McNamara, Abrams and so forth -- their peers moved quickly to protect, rehabilitate and restore them to the pantheon of the wise. Given that more than ten percent of the Council on Foreign Relations -- a sort of Elks Club for the tenured elite -- is composed of journalists, it is not surprising to find the latter often serving as EMTs, reviving some beloved source suffering a momentary attack of imperfection. This service was not, of course, provided to all. For example, surgeons general from the lesser ethnic groups could not expect rehabilitation, nor could individuals whose misdeeds were personal rather than merely an abrogation of the Constitution.

All this was carried out with a numbing smugness. Like the Cromwell described in *A Man for All Seasons,* the prototypical member of the old elite possesses "a self conceit that can cradle gross crimes in the name of effective action."

But now, without doubt, the party is over. To be sure, the elite does not admit this any more than it admits it exists at all, but to those like myself born on the cusp of the Second World War there is no point to the pretense. We remember the victories and the celebrations of them; we remember men standing motionless for the national anthem in baseball stadiums with fedoras held over their hearts; the jobs waiting for you when you graduated from college; politicians who were revered; newscasters who were trusted; and music that dripped syrup over our spirits and made them sweet and sticky. We remember when there was a right and wrong and who belonged with each. We remember a time when those in power lied and were actually able to fool us. We remember what a real myth is like.

Now, among the young or the ethnic, you can't raise a majority that is proud of this country. Most Americans believe we are on the wrong track. We hate our politicians, ignore our moral voices, and distrust our media. We have destroyed the natural habitats of the southern white pine and of the northern black human. We have created the nation's first downwardly mobile generation, reduced their parent's income, and removed the jobs of each to distant lands. We have sold our downtowns to foreign companies and sold our environment to domestic ones. We have created rapacious oligopolies of defense and medicine, frittered away public revenues and watched indifferently as the slain, the homeless and the miserable pile up. Perhaps most telling, we are no longer able to admire, but only to gawk.



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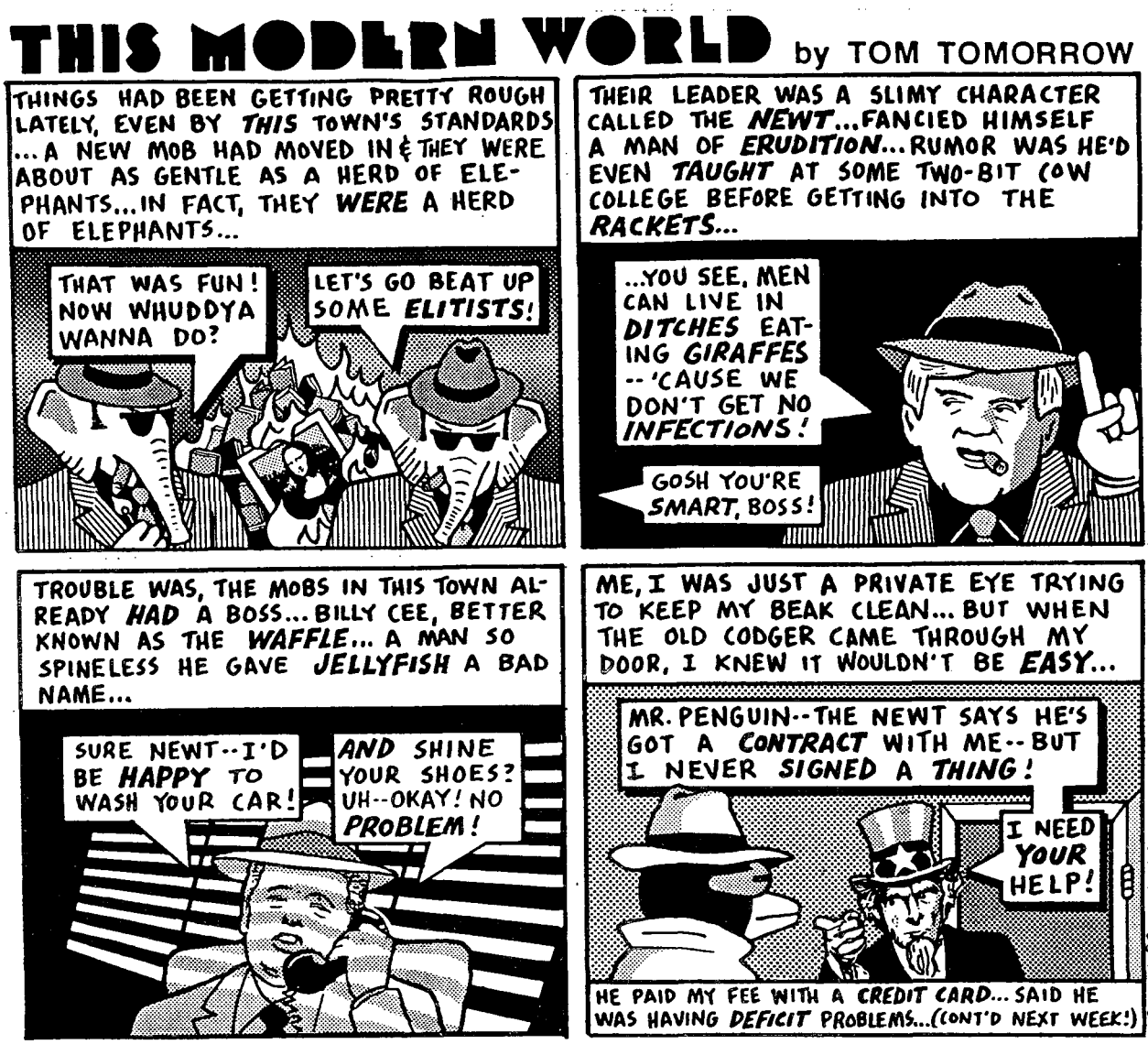
THIS MODERN WORLD by TOM TOMORROW
THINGS HAD BEEN GETTING PRETTY ROUGH LATELY, EVEN BY THIS TOWN'S STANDARDS ...A NEW MOB HAD MOVED IN & THEY WERE ABOUT AS GENTLE AS A HERD OF ELEPHANTS...IN FACT, THEY WERE A HERD OF ELEPHANTS...
THAT WAS FUN! NOW WHUDDYA WANNA DO?
LET'S GO BEAT UP SOME ELITISTS!
THEIR LEADER WAS A SLIMY CHARACTER CALLED THE NEWT...FANCIED HIMSELF A MAN OF ERUDITION...RUMOR WAS HE'D EVEN TAUGHT AT SOME TWO-BIT COW COLLEGE BEFORE GETTING INTO THE RACKETS...
...YOU SEE, MEN CAN LIVE IN DITCHES EATING GIRAFFES --'CAUSE WE DON'T GET NO INFECTIONS!
GOSH YOU'RE SMART, BOSS!
TROUBLE WAS, THE MOBS IN THIS TOWN ALREADY HAD A BOSS...BILLY CEE, BETTER KNOWN AS THE WAFFLE...A MAN SO SPINELESS HE GAVE JELLYFISH A BAD NAME...
SURE NEWT--I'D BE HAPPY TO WASH YOUR CAR!
AND SHINE YOUR SHOES? UH--OKAY! NO PROBLEM!
ME, I WAS JUST A PRIVATE EYE TRYING TO KEEP MY BEAK CLEAN...BUT WHEN THE OLD CODGER CAME THROUGH MY DOOR, I KNEW IT WOULDN'T BE EASY...
MR. PENGUIN--THE NEWT SAYS HE'S GOT A CONTRACT WITH ME--BUT I NEVER SIGNED A THING!
I NEED YOUR HELP!
HE PAID MY FEE WITH A CREDIT CARD...SAID HE WAS HAVING DEFICIT PROBLEMS...(CONT'D NEXT WEEK!)
TOM TOMORROW ©2-15-95

Many of the symbols of American power remain, but they have become crude -- desperately or carelessly imitative of something that is no longer there. We still stand for the *Star Spangled Banner*, but we no longer know what to do while on our feet. We still subscribe to the morning paper but it reads like stale beer. And we still vote, but expect ever less in return.

### Turning on others

An awfulness has come over us. We have become obsessed with what we should ignore and ignore what we should honor. We seem to have lost capacity for either grace or decency.

Something profound has happened and yet we are not even talking about it. The media won't tell us because it is largely servile towards, or owned by, those who have profited from the debacle. Instead, it daily aggravates our tendency to salve our discouragement by turning on others even more helpless than ourselves. The assault on the poor, minorities and immigrants is not an accident. It is what people do when they're not told what's really wrong, when the media won't let them in on the secret. It's one of power's oldest tricks: to deflect blame downward so the victims fight among themselves.

Nor is the destruction of social programs at every level mere happenstance. With the collapse of America's post-war empire, the country's elite has become increasingly concerned with getting more for itself while getting us to accept less. Hence the New York City budget that cut 24% from social services and added 7% to the police. It is, after all, cheaper to shoot or bury them then it is to sustain them. As Latin American countries have found, the children can live on the streets and the wealthy can hire guards to stand in front of their walled homes and life can be very pleasant as long as you are behind the wall and don't really think about it too much.

There is not among the elite, old or new, even any particular loyalty to this country. More and more, its business is elsewhere; and it is shamelessly willing to use political power to further that business. It seeks a playing field of greatly weakened countries in which stateless corporations and their managers are accountable to no one



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The pledge of allegiance has been replaced by trade agreements. The House Speaker talks of America; his wife works abroad.

Thus not only does the American elite lack any sense of guilt for what has happened, it is, like a hit and run driver, leaving the scene of the accident. More and more, those who run this country have the character of wealthy, isolated strangers -- armed but afraid, intrusive yet indifferent, personally profligate but politically penurious, priggish in rhetoric yet corrupt in action. No longer does even national myth connect them with the greater mass of America. Nor, any longer, does politics separate them from each other; Republicans and Democrats have become, rather than choices, degrees of the same thing.

### Hi. I'm America and I'm a recovering country

It is long overdue time to admit such things -- and to force our leaders and the media to admit them as well. One of the less observed utilities of the 1960s was serving as a group intervention, interrupting the self-justified intoxication of the elite consensus. This intervention provided the intellectual, moral and psychological framework for much that happened.

We need such intervention now. We need to speak the truth. To admit freely that America has crashed. To tell the story of how America's own elite helped to bring it down. And to argue that, by consequence, they have lost their license to lead.

We further need to commence the sort of inquiry that disasters demand, an investigation into the death of American substance and of the American spirit. Before such an inquiry we might bring such evidence as:

• The Vietnam War, the first great public disaster of the post-WWII best and brightest.

• The destruction of the America city, beginning with the subsidized suburbanization of the fifties, continuing through the economic abandonment of downtowns in the 70s and 80s, and ending with the Reagan-Bush-Clinton withdrawal of urban aid.

• Three decades of mob politics during which the country's elite snuggled up to its intelligence agencies, which in turn made numerous deleterious pacts with criminals, freebooters and drug lords.

• The drug war, now more dangerous to black US males than was serving in Vietnam. A barbaric, unconstitutional, and counterproductive battle that has placed large sections of our cities under para-military occupation and has corrupted our political life -- from police precincts to governors' mansions.

Shadows of Hope: You can order this highly praised new book on contemporary politics direct from the *Progressive Review*. Send $25 to the *Review*, 1739 Conn. Ave. NW Washington DC 20009

## CORRECTION OF A CORRECTION

In the last issue of the *Review*, attempting to correct an error in our on-line edition, we mistakenly said that David Corn of the *Nation* was incorrect to have included *Wired* magazine among contributors listed by the Peace and Freedom Foundation. In fact, the estimable Corn was correct in writing that PFF listed *Wired* among its contributors. Whether PFF was correct in doing so is a matter of dispute between it and *Wired*.

• The S&L and BCCI scandals, the bipartisan revival of robber baron politics that greatly destabilized our financial system.

• The failure to exercise ecological wisdom before large numbers of human lives were endangered, species damaged or destroyed, and lands ruined.

• The development of the corporate state in which the government is increasingly reduced to serving ever more powerful oligopolies.

• The conversion of medicine from a public service to a corporate exploitive enterprise.

• .The encouragement of economic desertion. Through such means as NAFTA and GATT, America has hastened the emigration of its own commercial base.

• The failure to halt the growing monopolization of information and ideas in the American media.

• The retreat from common responsibility for the problems of the nation's less fortunate.

• The nomination of Bill Clinton, the first modern president picked, managed and bankrolled by America's elite. This final error devastated the Democratic Party and made possible last November's right-wing coup.

In each of these instances, the plans were drawn, sold and executed by those who considered themselves among the nation's smartest men and women. And in each case, the nation paid a fearful price. In the end we have been left with a country devoid of confidence, a nation beset by fears, short on jobs, bereft of joy, disputatious, sniveling, without compassion, internationally impotent, domestically catatonic -- in a word, shattered.

While other generations of leaders have failed the country, none has managed to do quite so much damage. The first step in recovery is to reveal how this came about, and by whose hand, and then to tell them to be off. -- *Sam Smith*



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## News from the colonies

*The following is excerpted from remarks by your editor last month to DC New Democracy, the Washington DC affiliate of the New Party:*

Whatever it was that was optimistically called home rule is now gone. It died when our mayor offered to give much of it away. It died when our congressional delegate first suggested trading it for tax relief, and then proposed turning it over to a federal control board -- a sort of tyranny by accountants. It died when much of the media -- led by the *Washington Post* -- decided that democracy was just an experiment that had failed. It died when our city council was unable to propose a single workable alternative to the madness and when we found ourselves without elected officials who would speak for us.

Most of all, it died last November when the lobbyists and influence peddlers of Gucci Gulch slid from the corridors of Congress into the majority seats on the floor of the House and the Senate. When Newt Gingrich walked through the front door of the Speaker's office, democracy and justice walked out the back.

But let's be honest. The fault doesn't all lie with Congress, even if it did approve every line of every budget it now reviles. Even if in the private world of business it so admires, those with ultimate responsibility -- in this case Congress -- usually get the blame and the boot. Even if the financial control board represents yet another attempt by Congress to jettison the responsibility it refuses to give to the city and is unwilling to assume itself.

It is also true that for the entire time of home rule and before, local officials have let the budget and bureaucracy get out of hand, and have used every accounting gimmick known to modern capitalism to avoid dealing with financial facts. It is true that high and low officials have lied, stolen and cheated leaving us to pick up the tab.

But now another truth. Over the years I have become something of an aficionado of urban corruption. I can tell you a simple fact: DC has miles to go. The DC government is to waste and corruption as Pat Robertson is to sex. He may engage in it, but probably couldn't teach you much.

Let's remember that Orange County just lost one billion dollars on a few bad investments. Let's remember that the current cost overrun on Boston's third harbor tunnel -- this is federal money now -- is ten times that of the current DC deficit. And no one is talking of taking away Boston's home rule.

I don't excuse Marion Barry or the city council or Sharon Pratt Kelly at all. I don't even feel sorry for them any more. But let's stack their $720 million deficit up against what Congress has wrongfully denied us. Say $250 million a year more to provide a fair federal payment in lieu of service fees and taxes. Or the $300 million annually we're losing because we're not allowed to impose a non-resident income tax. Or the $300 million annually in local taxes Congress said that Fannie Mae doesn't have to pay. Or the $70 million in sales taxes we lose by not being able to charge the military or diplomats. All that before we add in the more than five billion that Congress has cheated DC workers out of by not funding their pensions.

Or look at it another way: in 1980, shortly after Barry first took office, there developed a combined current and past deficit of more than $500 million. Adjusted for inflation, this would be a deficit $120 million higher than today's. Yet nobody panicked. No democratic rights were taken away. It was a different time, though, with a different sort of Congress and a different sort of President.

It is important, as we view the wreckage of decades of hope and effort, to remember that we are not dealing with just a local problem. In this town of bureaucracy and civility, in which the most awful events are discussed with bland dispassion, it is easy not to notice that DC's story is a national and international one. The other day the ambassador of South Africa told Representative John Capozzi that "We are very interested in *your* struggle for liberation." Even after all his country has been through, this diplomat saw more significance in DC's problems than many of us do.

The city's status problem was noted near the beginning of its existence by a shrewd observer who warned of the dangers of mixing small and large concerns. Ever since, DC has been hostage to the ebb and flow of national tendencies, often getting the worst in bad times and having that much further to go in the good ones. We enjoyed some of the fruits of Reconstruction but when that collapsed so did the progress we had made. We found ourselves for the first time unable to vote for anyone for a whole century. When America got dreams of empire, its ambition was reflected in the neo-imperial architecture of government buildings from the Lincoln Memorial to the Federal Triangle. When World War II broke out, Washington became the chaotic, crowded hub of a country united in its cause, even turning over the Mall for temporary buildings.

When the war was over, Washington early felt the force of economic pressures that would eventually leave many American cities in ruins. We had the country's first major urban renewal project in Southwest. We were told we could not survive without freeways stabbing the urban heart and we had to fight them off. And we watched the suburbs bloom as government housing funds drifted outward.

Then with the war on poverty and the civil rights and peace movements, DC regained vibrancy and hope. This town was one of a handful -- such as Berkeley and Madison -- where, as a matter of course, you expected something important to happen. And it often did.

But with the Vietnam War sucking life out of that hope and vibrancy and with the murder of Dr. King, there followed an national urban insurrection. In the wake of this insurrection, DC was shortly granted first an elected school board, then a non-voting delegate and finally an elected mayor and council. For once, someone in power was actually afraid of this city.



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Now the shroud has fallen again. And could we really expect more local decency from a Congress that is repealing even the social reforms of its own Richard Nixon? For better or worse, our fate is inexorably linked with that of other Americans. We not only symbolize that fate, many of our citizens will suffer it to a disproportionate degree.

It was recently reported that the number of welfare recipients here had gone up 20% in three years. This does not represent poor families moving into DC to enjoy what the *Post* calls "Cadillac" Medicaid benefits. No, these are citizens who have fallen into poverty as a result of the most disastrous national economic policies since the 1920s.

These are more victims of the political stampede of the 1990s, in which many Americans have been convinced that if they don't immediately flee from simple justice, compassion and common sense, then first their government and then they themselves will become bankrupt. Leading this stampede are the voices of the largest corporations and investment firms, many of whom increasingly owe their livelihoods to profits earned abroad. In the cause of "global competition" we have become an undeveloping country and the new welfare recipients in DC have joined a very long line.

So as we start the struggle for self-determination again, let's make it not only our own fight but also become leaders in what must be a national reclamation of decency and justice. Let's make our cause as one with all the other Americans who are victims of the self-righteous, self-aggrandizing yuppie yahoos who have seized, and are now selling off, our national assets to better the profits of their campaign contributors.

We are, after all, experts at what happens when democracy is sacrificed for a balanced budget, when the poor are punished for not being successful, when ethnic prejudice is concealed in the cold numbers of a financial worksheet, when access to fairness is privatized, when the dream of a cooperative commonwealth is smashed with the cry, "I've got mine, Jack. You're on your own."

So if we are once again to be a full and unmitigated colony, let's return to our obstreperous, vigorous ways of the times before they sedated us with a weak elected mayor and council. We were more alive when we were in revolt than we have ever been since being appeased. Keeping in mind Albert Camus's dictum that the one sin we are not permitted is despair, let's use DC both as an symbol of what the rest of the country stands to lose and as the hub of a mass refusal to acquiesce in this loss. --*S..S*

# The Weather Report

## Whitewater

One of the biggest story in town has yet to be published. "The Crimes of Mena," by Sally Denton and Roger Morris, is a well-documented account of drug and Contra operations in Arkansas during the 80s. It was finally pulled by the authors after eleven weeks of internal *sturm und drang* at the *Washington Post*. The paper's bosses were split, with the Sunday Outlook section wanting to run with the piece but being overruled by higher-ups. In fact, Outlook was prepared to pay its highest price ever for the story.

While portions of the Mena affair have been reported elsewhere (including here), the Denton/Morris piece is significant in two ways. First, it is based on more than 2000 documents from the files of ex-drug smuggler -- and sometime intelligence asset -- the late Barry Seal. This is the most extensive collection of evidence yet about the role of Arkansas as a sort of domestic narco-republic during the 1980s. Second, its appearance in the *Washington Post* would have provided credibility to the Mena story -- necessary for those journalists and establishment figures who heel to the *Post* much as many right-wingers follow the lead of Limbaugh and Robertson. To have run the story would have marked a major turn in the *Post*'s take on Whitewater. As recently as last July, it published a lead Style section piece making fun of the Mena affair, saying "allegedly dark deeds at Mena have helped foster the cult of conspiracy that has taken root among some of Clinton's more virulent opponents."

The Denton/Morris story tells of "literally hundreds of millions of dollars in drug profits" being developed by the Mena operation, of CIA involvement, and of nine different official investigations being stifled under two presidents (Reagan and Bush) and one governor (Clinton).

The story does not directly implicate Clinton but raises deep questions. As one law enforcement official noted, Clinton may be the first president to have such close buddies who were targets of intense narcotics investigations. Yet in sum, Mena has much more in common with the multi-faceted and bipartisan corruption of the S&L scandal or BCCI than with a who-done-it. There may be no smoking gun here, only a shocking tale of how America's political and intelligence establishment



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investigations. Yet in sum, Mena has much more in common with the multi-faceted and bipartisan corruption of the S&L scandal or BCCI than with a who-done-it. There may be no smoking gun here, only a shocking tale of how America's political and intelligence establishment became partners with the international drug trade it was purporting to battle.

Why did the *Post* pass up this blockbuster? There are a number of theories. One is that it would have caused too much trouble for its pals at the CIA. Another is that the *Post* is still trying to keep the Clinton administration from drowning -- and shrank from the prospect of causing it further damage. Perhaps it was a combination of motivations, including a realization of how the story would hurt Americans' faith in their elite. In any case, it was a futile effort as this story will soon be published in a national magazine and Denton and Morris will finally get the credit the *Post* denied them.

According to the *New York Post,* an extraordinary 100 FBI agents are working on the Whitewater affair in Little Rock. That's more than were used in the John Gotti investigation.

Among other finds by the *New York Post:* in Sept. 1992, just before the election, an auditing firm issued a confidential report saying that the Arkansas Development Finance Authority "was not complying with its board approved policy regarding loan review." The firm pointed to four loans that were made without any documentation as to why they were "approved over the staff's recommendation." The *NY Post* also notes that ADFA in 1986 borrowed $5 million from a Japanese bank so it could buy stock in a Barbados reinsurance firm -- Coral Reinsurance -- that is managed by American International Group, an insurance company whose board Lloyd Bentson just joined. The deal was put together by Goldman Sachs, former home of the current treasury secretary, Robert Rubin. The SEC is looking into the mysterious Coral.

The Vincent Foster case just won't go away. Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, one of the hardy band that has stayed on the Whitewater case, reported recently in the *London Telegraph* that a member of the Foster family now says "he no longer believes the official verdict of suicide. He suspects the death may have been a political murder with elements of government complicity. He says some other members of the family are increasingly willing to entertain that idea." Evans-Pritchard also cites an anonymous high level FBI source as expressing suspicions of a Park Police cover-up in the case. Questions concerning the Foster death include whether the body had been moved to the location where it was found, why Foster's fingerprints were not on the gun, why there were no skull fragments found, why there was no investigation of the carpet fibers and blond hair on Foster's clothes and even where the body was really discovered.

Meanwhile the *Wall Street Journal* ran a front-page story recently pooh-poohing Whitewater, which has fed fears in some quarters of a bipartisan cover-up. The argument is that the Republicans were all for exposing Whitewater (although according to their own time schedule) until the Denton/Morris expose on Mena broke water. This story may prove more embarrassing to Reagan, Bush and North than it will to Clinton. Besides it threatens to revive interest in the BCCI scandal, with bipartisan damage. . . Another view is that this story is out of anyone's control and will come out one way or the other.

On the other hand, here's the take of Whitewater bird-dog William Rees-Mogg of the *Times* of London:

> At certain historic moments, Washington is not just strange but positively weird, a hallowe'en city in which all the ghosts walk . . . It is like that now, a heartsick city powdered in February snow.
>
> If one reads the *Washington Post*, one might believe that the government of the United States is proceeding more or less normally. Admittedly, one might be surprised to read that only $600,000 has been subscribed to the President's legal aid fund, though nearly $1,600,000 has already been spent on his costs over Whitewater and the comparatively trivial Paula Jones case. Yet otherwise one might think that the political process was going along much as usual.
>
> Nothing could be further from the truth. As soon as one starts to talk to Washington insiders, one realizes that President Clinton is trapped by a process of inquiry from which he would be unlikely to escape even if he were wholly innocent of any wrongdoing. And he is far from that.

## Loose change

As some in America's establishment struggled to find new ways to punish welfare recipients for being poor, others had reason to be grateful to them. On Feb. 3, for example, after the Dow Jones rose nearly 60 points, the AP reported, "Investors went on a buying spree across nearly all sectors of the market. . . The buying was sparked by a Labor Department report that unemployment rose to 5.7 percent from 5.4 percent."

## Just politics

Based on recent polls, you are in the American mainstream if you believe:

- the GOP "contract" is unrealistic
- a job should be provided before someone is cut off welfare
- defense spending should be cut
- it's okay to put US troops under UN command
- prevention funds should be provided in any crime bill
- the assault weapons ban was a good thing



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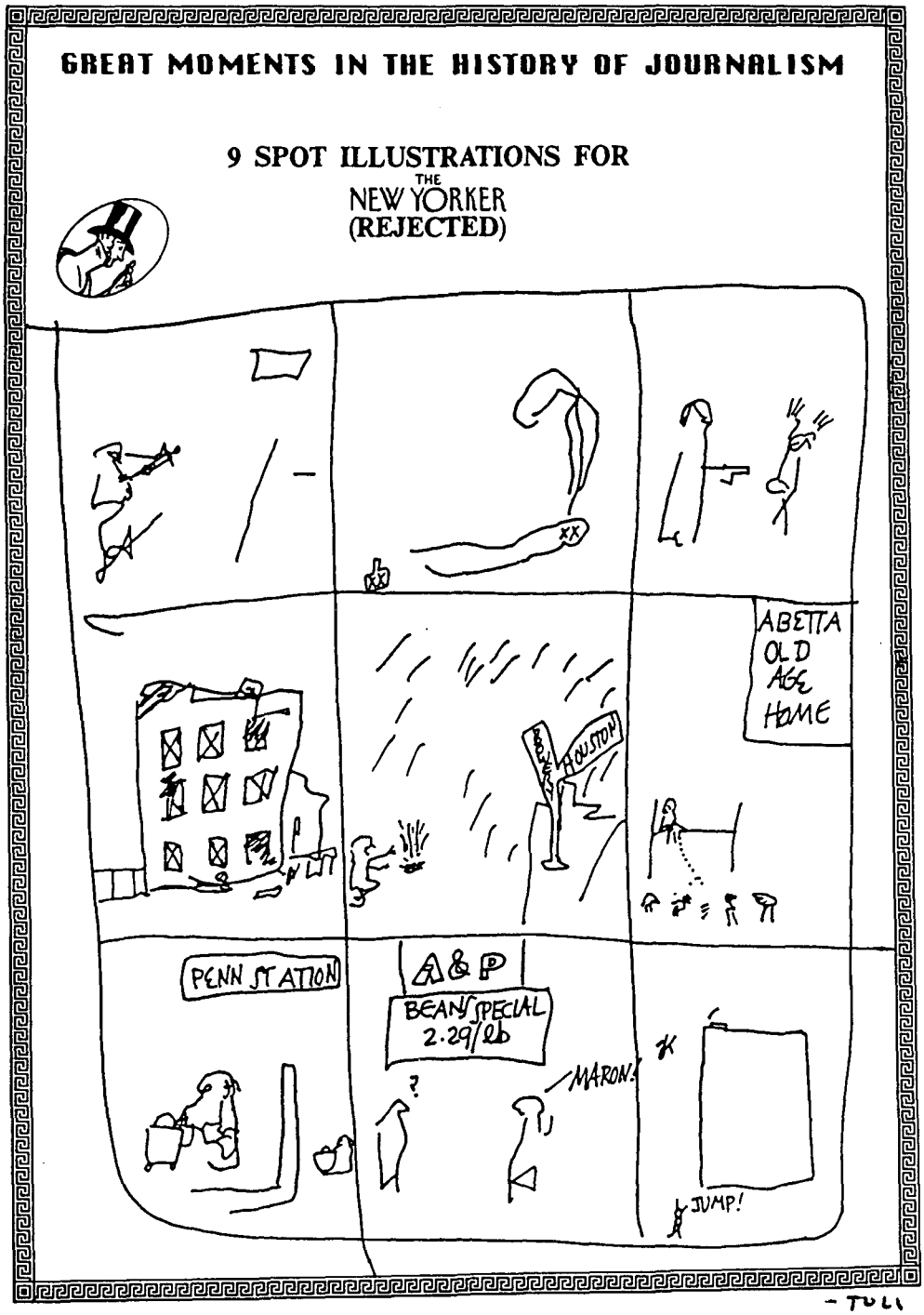
One of the characteristics of the Gingrich Gang is their stunning lack of grace. They have not only declared war on the social welfare state and on democracy, but even upon feudalism and the concept of *noblesse oblige*. They feel under obligation to nothing but their own ambition; the notion that those with power owe something to those without -- as in, say, a tithe -- appears completely alien to them. Unlike the most corrupt and self-indulgent of the Romans, they are even opposed to bread and circuses. One senses, however, that they don't so much despise the poor as they fear them, realizing subconsciously how little would be left if they themselves were stripped of their power and access to money.

If you're looking for the genesis of this unappealing culture of self-aggrandizement, the intensely Darwinian values of contemporary law and business education is not a bad place to start. It was here that many smart Americans learned that you could get your quid without a quo. As one law student put it, "Whatever ideals we came in with get bashed out of us."




For an insight into Gingrich's own brand of moral dyslexia, a 1984 article in *Mother Jones* is helpful. The article describes Gingrich's campaign against Virginia Shapard in 1978, including one ad that attacked her plan to commute to Washington, leaving her businessman husband and children in the district. In the ad was a photo of Gingrich with the caption, "When elected, Newt will keep his family together." The reality was that Gingrich staffers were even then taking bets on when his marriage would break up. In 1980, Gingrich told his wife he was filing for divorce. And according to a friend, Lee Howell, here's how he did it:

Going to the hospital where his wife was recovering from cancer surgery, "Newt went up there with his yellow legal pad, and he had a list of things on how the divorce was going to be handled. He wanted her to sign it. She was . . . still sort of out of it, and he comes in with a yellow sheet of paper, handwritten, and wants her to sign it . . . He handled the divorce like he did any other political decision: you've got to be tough in this business, you've got to be hard. Once you make the decision you've got to act on it. Cut your losses and move on."

Part of Gingrich's plan was to try to get away with paying only $400 a month support for his children, a request that incensed many townspeople and was rejected



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by the judge. Said Howell: "Newt Gingrich has a tendency to chew people up and spit them out. He uses you for all it's worth, and when he doesn't need you anymore he throws you away. Very candidly, I don't think that Newt Gingrich has many principles, except for what's best for him." And this from a guy who was still calling Newt a friend.

Finally, a summation from L. H. Carter, who was one of Gingrich's closest friends and advisors until they fell out in 1979: "The important thing you have to understand about Newt Gingrich is that he is amoral. There isn't any right or wrong, there isn't any conservative or liberal. There's only what will work best for Newt Gingrich. He's probably one of the most dangerous people for the future of this country . . . He's Richard Nixon glib. It doesn't matter how much good I do the rest of my life, I can't ever outweigh the evil that I've caused by helping him be elected to Congress."

USN&WR quotes jargonmeister Alvin Toffler as placing the contract on America back with industrialism and other blasts from the past. Said Toffler: "I believe the contract is basic, second-wave underbrush that needs to be cleared away. The only third wave aspect of it is the emphasis on devolution." We've never seen anyone clear brush with a wave of any number, but never mind. It's nice to see that not even Gingrich understands what Toffler is talking about.

As we have noted previously, the concept of devolution has a long and somewhat leftish provenance. It also has had friends in high places. For example, Pope Pius XI, in a 1931 encyclical, said that society's decisions should always be taken at the lowest practical level. It is a "grave evil" he argued, for higher authorities to usurp powers which can be exercised by smaller local institutions.

According to *Newsweek*, when a politician in Texas claims credit for something he actually voted against, they call it "gramm-standing." -- after their senator turned presidential candidate, Phil Gramm. The newsweekly gave some examples: The longtime foe of government spending was born on a military base and had his education partly funded by GI insurance and the National Defense Fellowship (both of which he later voted to cut). He campaigned for a fellow Republican in 1990, attacking the Democrat in the race because "he didn't serve in the military." Neither did Gramm. In 1976, he ran against Lloyd Bentsen for the Senate at a time when Bentsen was also running for president. He argued that incumbents should resign to run for higher office. Today, Gramm isn't resigning.

The Green Party in Maine confounded stereotypes -- and reversed itself -- by coming out against the controversial new EPA auto emissions testing. Said Green Party coordinator Jonathan Carter, "This law is unfair to poor and working people who cannot afford to pay up to $450 to have their cars fixed."

## Ready for anything

Let's imagine that Cuba, Libya, Iraq and North Korea -- our major current nemeses -- all ganged up on the US and started a war at the same time. According to figures from the Center for Defense Information, the US would still have 3.7 million active and reserve forces against its enemies' 3 million. It would have 15,000 tanks vs. 10,000, 13,000 aircraft vs. 3,000, 9000 helicopters vs. 1,000 and 300 ships vs. about a hundred. The largest of these potential opponents, North Korea, would be over a million soldiers shy of the American potential force, 10,000 short of tanks, 12,000 behind in planes, nearly 9,000 short of helicopters It would also have only one ship for every six American ones. Just wanted you to sleep better tonight.

## Land of the free

President Clinton's executive order regarding allegedly terrorist Middle East groups is strikingly unconstitutional. Clinton's attempt to wrap within the mantle of a "national emergency" violent acts disrupting the "Middle East peace process" implies that the president could declare a "national emergency" whenever foreign policy is not going his way. Under the Clinton order, not only are the US assets of several Middle East groups frozen, but any contributions to ten Palestinian and two Israeli organizations are barred. The groups include several mainstream Palestinian organizations including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (second in size to the PLO) and Hamas, membership in which the administration itself argued last year should not be subject to immigration exclusion because of its social welfare work . . . As Georgetown law professor David Cole wrote recently in the *Nation*, the order "makes it open season on any organization that might provide humanitarian aid to Palestinian groups in the Middle East." Cole also points out that "the first amendment guarantees every person in the United States the right to support organizations that engage in lawful as well as unlawful acts, as long as the donor does not specifically intend to further the group's unlawful acts."

## The mediacracy

While the white guards of conservatism rail against public broadcasting, TCI, the world's largest cable operator -- reaching about a quarter of all American cable homes -- is providing an indication of what life would be like under fully privatized broadcasting. The cable monopoly offers the right-wing National Empowerment Television, the American Conservative Network and Pat Robertson's Family Channel (of which it is part-owner) but carries the liberal 90s Channel on only seven of its 1000 systems. It



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now appears that the 90s Channel will be dropped completely at the end of the agreement period. Jeff Cohen, director of FAIR, says, "The public needs to be concerned about TCI's monopoly control over information. While cable often offers 50 channels or more, the cable company has almost absolute discretion over what is carried and what isn't. The fact that TCI is using its control for ideological purposes is very disturbing."

On top of all that, McNeil-Lehrer has sold two thirds of its production company to a subsidiary of TCI. The *New York Daily News* notes, "For TCI, the investment into a well-respected journalism outfit may actually help better its image with Washington insiders."

# Roadsigns

What Americans think the average AFDC welfare benefit is: $685 a month. What it actually is: $366. *[Left Business Observer]*

Christmas performances of the Nutcracker Suite as a percentage of all dance performances in the US: 40%. The three most popular Mozart operas as a percentage of all operas performed in the US: 20% *[Alice Goldbard Marguis in the New York Times]*

PAC contributions from just three major anti-enviromental lobbies in 1994: $8.3 milion. PAC contributions made by the entire environmental movement: $1.7 million. *[Neighborhood Watch]*

Amount pro baseball players and their lobbyists have given to Congressional campaigns since 1987: $147,000. Among owners, their companies and their lobbyists have contributed to congressional campaigns since 1987: $2.3 million *[Center for Responsive Politics]*

The National Security Council is pushing a plan that would concentrate computer security authority within the intelligence community. Such authority would permit direct involvement by the military and the NSA in domestic affairs.

According to Alexander Cockburn in the *Nation*, when told that PBS was to be defunded, Ben Wattenberg howled in disbelief: "What! Just when we've taken it over?"


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